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# STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD ON REACHING THE POOREST AND OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TOGETHER

## A. A World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty

1. On 17 October 1987, Father Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, brought 100,000 people together on the Plaza of Human Rights in Paris when he unveiled a commemorative stone in honour of the victims of extreme poverty, violence and ignorance. The words engraved on the stone recall one of the greatest challenges facing the international community:

> "Wherever men and women are condemned to live in poverty, human rights are violated. It is our solemn duty to come together to ensure that these rights are respected."

2. Every 17 October, thousands of people of all backgrounds and from all countries gather around the very poor. 17 October has become a special day to observe silence in honour of the victims of misery, to listen to them and to renew, individually and together, our commitment to overcome extreme poverty.

3. The proclamation by the United Nations in December 1992 that established 17 October as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty continues the history started in 1987 and places the poorest at the heart of the international community.

## B. A call to overcome the worst aspects of poverty

4. In its 1993 State of the World's Children report, UNICEF launches an appeal to overcome the worst aspects of poverty, the ones that hurt and crush the dignity, the integrity and the life of the poorest people. This appeal is

courageous and necessary and it indicates that UNICEF continues to be, within the United Nations system, a faithful defender of the poorest children and of their families.

5. UNICEF continues to give much attention to the objective of reaching the poorest. The report of the Executive Director devotes many paragraphs to this issue. Also, the UNICEF Evaluation Office is working with the International Movement ATD Fourth World and some members of its Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World on a study that aims to identify and analyse the conditions necessary if the poorest are to participate in development programmes.

### C. Refusing to accept extreme poverty, overcoming the worst aspects of poverty and reaching the poorest: allied objectives

6. The International Movement ATD Fourth World considers these three objectives to be inextricably linked: (a) refusing to accept extreme poverty; (b) overcoming the worst aspects of poverty; and (c) reaching the poorest people. These objectives can be attained only when they are pursued together and simultaneously.

7. For example, the availability of some resources and means is necessary to eradicate poverty but the objective will not be reached without the personal commitment of men and women, and without the firm commitment of countries and institutions that will be ready to make common cause with the poorest, as UNICEF has said, and that will be ready to walk on the necessary road to establish a real solidarity with the most deprived inhabitants of our nations. Eradicating extreme poverty will only be possible if all persons, at their own level, in their own milieu and in their own areas of responsibility choose to ally themselves with the poorest people.

8. To overcome the worst aspects of poverty, we must reach the poorest people because it is the poorest children and their families who suffer the most from malnutrition, illness, illiteracy and natural and man-made catastrophes. There is general agreement on this point.

9. The poorest are not passive victims. They actively resist injustices and struggle against their poverty. In this field of extreme poverty, they are the primary experts, having an understanding and practical knowledge that no one else has.

10. To overcome the worst aspects of extreme poverty, we must make sure that services and programmes reach the poorest people and also give ourselves the means to learn about their experiences, efforts and successes and about the obstacles they face. Without this strong will to reach the poorest and learn from them, extreme poverty will persist because whole areas of knowledge will be missing. We might improve the living conditions of a large number of people but we will not have reached the poorest of the poor and, therefore, not have established a minimum level of security for all.

11. The International Movement ATD Fourth World believes that the objective of reaching the poorest becomes central at a time when the international community,

with UNICEF as the leader, is launching a call to overcome the worst aspects of poverty and to go beyond "loud" and "silent" emergencies. Major steps forward will be possible in this fight against extreme poverty if this objective is pursued.

12. The Executive Board should reaffirm the importance of this objective of reaching the poorest and continue to be one of its faithful defenders within the United Nations system. The Executive Board and its members might also wish to support existing efforts to improve our knowledge of the conditions necessary if this objective is to be attained.

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